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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

November 04, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 4850 - UNKNOWN)
TAGS: OIIP, KMDR
Captions: None
Subject: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AL-ITTIHAD BUSINESS COLUMNIST
REPORTS ON HIS WEEK-LONG TRIP TO IRAQ
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 04850

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: PAO
INFO: ECON POL AMB DCM
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ACTION: PAO

DISSEMINATION: PAO
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: PAO:HOLSIN-WINDECKER
DRAFTED: PAO:AHOSHAN
CLEARED: NONE

VZCZCADI329
OO RUEHC RUENAAA RUEKJCS RUEHZM RUEHLO RUEHFR
RHRMDAB RUCJACC RUCQSOC
DE RUEHAD #4850/01 3080336
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 040336Z NOV 03
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2281
RUENAAA/SECNAV WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHZM/GCC COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON// PASS TO MOC// 0736
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0766
RHRMDAB/COMUSNAVCENT
RUCJACC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
RUCQSOC/USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL//PA//

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 004850

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP; NEA/PPD; NEA/RA; INR/R/MR; PA;
INR/NESA; INR/B; IIP/G/NEA-SA
WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE; NSC
SECDEF FOR OASD/PA
USCINCCENT FOR POLAD
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH; PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AL-ITTIHAD BUSINESS COLUMNIST
REPORTS ON HIS WEEK-LONG TRIP TO IRAQ

1. SUMMARY: THROUGHOUT THE WEEK OCTOBER 25-31, JOURNALIST SHIHAB GERGASH OF AL-ITTIHAD WROTE A 7-PART SERIES DESCRIBING A TRIP TO IRAQ. HIS UPBEAT ARTICLES NOTE THAT IRAQ UNDER BREMER IS FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES, THAT THE MARKETS IN BAGHDAD AND OTHER IRAQI CITIES ARE FULL OF GOODS AND LIFE IS ALMOST NORMAL, AND ATTRIBUTES THE DISTORTED IMAGE OF IRAQ TO THE ARAB SATELLITE CHANNELS. END SUMMARY.

2. UAE COLUMNIST AND BUSINESS WRITER SHIHAB GERGASH WROTE IN ABU DHABI-BASED SEMI-OFFICIAL ARABIC DAILY "AL-ITTIHAD" A 7-PART SERIES ON A TRIP TO IRAQ. IN THE FIRST SEGMENT ON OCTOBER 25, HE WRITES THAT "WE HEAR AND READ ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN OCCUPIED IRAQ. IN THESE CLOUDY CIRCUMSTANCES I MADE A TRIP TO IRAQ THROUGH WHICH I TRIED TO SEPARATE LIES FROM FACTS. DURING THIS WEEK WE WILL REVIEW WHAT I SAW THERE WHICH BRINGS WITH IT PROMISES OF A BETTER FUTURE AND WARNINGS AGAINST THE FALL IN THE ABYSS. THE IRAQ OF BREMER THAT WE SEE TODAY IS FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AT THE SAME TIME."

3. "...THE IRAQ OF BREMER IS MORE LIKE A WHITE PAINTING WHERE THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ ARE DRAWING THEIR VIEW FOR A BETTER FUTURE AND MORE HONORABLE LIFE. IT IS A CHANCE TO BUILD A NEW SOCIETY ON A SOUND BASIS AND A STRONG ECONOMY THAT WOULD BE A MODEL FOR ALL... THE IRAQ OF BREMER IS A PROVISIONAL STOPPING POINT ON THE ROAD TOWARD AN INDEPENDENT IRAQ. HOWEVER, FOLLOWING (ARAB) SATELLITES EVERY EVENING PERSUADES US OF THE POOR SITUATION AND DESPAIR IN THE FUTURE."

4. PART TWO TELLS THE READERS THAT BAGHDAD'S MARKETS ARE FULL OF GOODS WHERE IRAQIS AND AMERICAN SOLDIERS BUY THEIR NECESSITIES TOGETHER. "IN GENERAL MONEY IS AVAILABLE AND THE CONSUMER WANTS TO END LONG YEARS OF DEPRIVATION WITH VERY LITTLE LUXURY..."

5. IN THE THIRD SEGMENT, GERGASH NOTES THAT "BAGHDAD'S STREETS BECOME EVACUATED AT NIGHT AND EVERYONE AVOIDS LEAVING, AVOIDING THE CRIMINAL ELEMENTS AND THE CURFEW THAT BECOMES EFFECTIVE AT MIDNIGHT. THEREFORE, WE GATHER AROUND THE TV WHERE THE SATELLITE CHANNELS BECOME THE ONLY TOOL THAT TELLS US ABOUT ANYTHING THAT HAPPENS OUTSIDE. THERE IS A GREAT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REALITY AND WHAT WE SEE IN THE NEWS CHANNELS. EXCEPT FOR THE NIGHT OUTINGS, EVERYTHING IS ALMOST NORMAL... THE PROBLEM OF THE DISTORTED IMAGE OF IRAQ IN THE EYES OF THE ARABS IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ARAB SATELLITES THAT HAVE NOT SUCCEEDED IN PORTRAYING AN IMAGE AWAY FROM EMOTIONAL EXAGGERATION. EMOTIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE REASON FOR MOST OF OUR CRISES IN THESE BITTER DAYS WE LIVE IN."

6. IN THE FOURTH SEGMENT, THE AUTHOR TALKS ABOUT KURDS WHO ARE CONFUSED BETWEEN THEIR EMOTIONAL DESIRE FOR AN INDEPENDENT KURDISH STATE AND THEIR REASON THAT WARNS THEM AGAINST THE SEPARATION FROM THE BIGGER IRAQ. "THE CITIES OF KURDISTAN ARE MORE SECURE AND CLEANER THAN THE REST OF IRAQI CITIES AND LIFE IS NORMAL UNDER THE CONTROL OF KURDISH PARTIES..."

7. IN EPISODE FIVE, GERGASH TALKS ABOUT THE AMERICAN DETERMINATION TO PROVIDE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LARGEST NUMBER OF IRAQI PEOPLE, BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT EVEN THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW. "IN ANY CHAT WITH AMERICAN OFFICIALS THEY REITERATE THAT THE INEVITABLE ECONOMIC REFORM AND THE BOOSTING OF THE ROLE OF THE IRAQI CITIZEN IN REBUILDING THEIR NATION WILL BE DONE THROUGH TRADE AND INVESTMENT AND OTHER INCREASING BUSINESS ACTIVITIES. THE QUESTION OF PRIVATIZATION IS ANOTHER ISSUE OF CONFUSION... DUE TO THE SECURITY SITUATION..."

8. IN THE SIXTH EPISODE, THE AUTHOR TELLS US ABOUT HIS TRIP TO FALLUJAH, WITH IMAGES OF BOMBS, BATTLES, AND APACHES. "FALLUJAH WAS FREE OF ANY AMERICAN PRESENCE BECAUSE THEY HAVE DECIDED TO QUIT THE CITY AND ONLY GO THERE WHENEVER IT IS NECESSARY. THE CITY DOES NOT SEEM THE RIGHT PLACE TO HAVE LUNCH, BUT THIS IS WHAT WE DID. WE DECIDED TO GO AND HAVE LUNCH AT HAJI HUSSEIN'S RESTAURANT...WITH A LARGE CROWD OF TRUCK DRIVERS AND OTHERS..."

9. IN THE LAST EPISODE THE AUTHOR TELLS US THAT HE VISITED IRAQ BY LAND FROM AMMAN, CROSSING A DESERT OF MORE THAN 1000 KILOMETERS BY VAN. "THE DRIVER HAS BEEN DOING SO FOR LONG YEARS. THE DRIVER'S RELATIONS ARE EXCEPTIONALLY IMPORTANT AT THE JORDANIAN-IRAQI BORDERS. THE JORDANIAN BORDERS ARE STRANGE. ON ONE HAND THEY REPRESENT AN EXIT SIMILAR TO THE UMBILICAL CORD FOR THE JORDANIAN ECONOMY FOR TWO DECADES. THE ROAD ON THE JORDANIAN

SIDE IS OLD AND DANGEROUS, THE INSTALLATIONS ARE AGING AND THE TREATMENT OF THE CUSTOMS VERY DRY, AWAY FROM ANY HUMAN AND COOPERATIVE SPIRIT. HOWEVER, MY TREATMENT WAS PREFERABLE BECAUSE I WAS FOREIGNER AND NOT IRAQI. THIS IS WHY I ASKED THE DRIVER TO TAKE ME TO THE AIRPORT WHERE I MANAGED TO ARRANGE MY RETURN TO THE UAE. MY WEEK'S EXPERIENCE IN IRAQ WAS FULL OF EXPERIENCES THAT WOULD TELL US WHERE IRAQ IS HEADING IN THE FUTURE."

ALBRIGHT